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ADVERTISE IN THE FARMER.

A WOMAN'S ENCHANTMENT

By William Le Queux

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(Continued.)

Up to the present I had at least eluded the vigilance of the police. Absence of luggage had, no doubt, placed them off the scent. They never dreamed that I intended to get away to the continent, though my visit to the bank was a somewhat suspicious yet necessary move.

To further describe the long and tedious journey from the Hook of Holland down to Budapest, where I joined the orient express, which took me on to Constantinople, is here unnecessary. Many of you have done that journey. Suffice it to say that five days after leaving London I stood in the big long hall of the Pera Palace Hotel, on the hill overlooking the Golden Horn, my hand clasped warmly in that of my friend Granny Gough.

"At last, old chap!" he cried. "I dared not come down to the station to meet you, for I didn't know who might be following you. Come up to my room and let's talk."

We ascended in the lift, and with the door closed he pulled forward a big saddlebag chair for me, and sank into one himself. "You must be fagged out. Have a drink," he urged.

"No, my dear fellow. No alcohol when one is tired, as I am. A cup of bouillon rather. They're sure to have some in the hotel." And he rang and ordered what I desired.

"Well," I exclaimed, "you may just imagine how delighted I was to get your wire. I went to Colchester, and heard from your landlady the catastrophe that happened."

"Yes. But who gave me away?" "Garshore. He bribed a telegraph messenger to get him a copy of your message to me. He and I were together at the Stapletons."

"And he wired to the police. Ah!" he cried, "I see it all now—but they didn't get me, after all."

"You had a narrow squeak, Granny—eh?" "Narrow. Rather!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "The two men didn't know that I'm an expert with my fists. I just waited my opportunity, and in a quiet part of the road bowled them both over. Then I took to my heels across the fields and escaped. It was quite unromantic, I assure you."

and his big, clean-shaven face, with the merry blue eyes, broadened into a smile. "I fear that both of them bear marks on the faces, but I really couldn't help it. I'll apologize to them some day."

"Your landlady said that they drove you away back to Grantham. She didn't know the truth, it seems. But why didn't you let me know this?" I queried.

"Because I feared that your correspondence might be watched. I didn't know whether you were in London. When I got here I first went to Hessian Pasha, the chief of police, who is an old friend of mine, told him a few facts and made him promise that if there were inquiries from England he would let me know in sufficient time to allow me to escape. You know how things are worked out here in the east—it's all backsheesh. Then I dared to wire you."

"And I'm here—delighted to discover that you're still free, old fellow."

"Have you seen Myra?" I replied in the affirmative, whereupon he asked me in quick anxiety to tell him all that had occurred.

"What does she think?" he demanded. "What does she say?"

Briefly I related the chief events of my visit to Yorkshire, and he sat listening to me without uttering a word. Tears sprang to his eyes as I told him of the firm belief in him which Myra had still expressed.

"Ah!" he ejaculated at last, with a deep sigh. "She still believes in me—still loves me—eh?"

"Yes," I answered. "She will hear none of the foul calumnies of that blackguard Garshore."

He was silent, with bent head. "What do you really know concerning Garshore, Granny?" I asked him presently.

"Nothing—nothing more than what I've already told you."

Would that I could have revealed to him the astounding story which Elfrida had told me. But I was under a promise of secrecy. My lips were sealed. Had I been free to tell the truth—free to inform the police that Rufford and Garshore were one and the same individual—then the whole course of events would no doubt have been altered, and who knows—perhaps the mystery of Redcliffe Gardens at once cleared up. But as matters stood I remained fettered, and Granny brandished an assassin.

I put a few questions to him. What I had told him concerning Myra had upset the dear old fellow. He loved her and her heart was his.

The man before me who had lived on his wits all those long years—and had lived well, too—was nervous and broken. I had never seen him before in that state. When the multifarious businesses, concessions and the like he had in hand did not go exactly as he should he had certainly shown signs of nerves. But he could always so control his face and feelings before strangers that even when he had but a single frown left in his pocket he retained the appearance of a prosperous man. His silk hat, when he did business, was of the glossiest, and his perfect-fitting frock coat was always immaculate. The outsider could never read the big, open, yet sphinx-like countenance of Granville Gough, the friend of diplomats, and at the same time the associate of half the shadiest characters on the continent. Once he told me with a light laugh that he'd rather face a horde of armed Kurds—as he had done—than a hotel manager with an unpaid bill.

"Rastoin!" he exclaimed at last, raising his troubled face to me. "I told you in Bucharest that I was dead

You didn't believe me. You know now that I told you the truth!" "Broke!" I echoed. "Why, my dear fellow, there's no such word in your vocabulary!"

"There hasn't been—until the present time," he sighed, and, rising, he went to the window and looked gloomily out.

I was quickly at his side, my hand upon his shoulder.

"Look here, Granny," I said, "what's the use of beating about the bush? Tell me the truth—tell me all that happened in London."

He made no answer. His chin had fallen upon his chest.

Beyond the open window lay the tall white houses and red roofs of Pera, the quarter of the embassies. And behind, in the hot afternoon sun, shone the still waters of the Golden Horn.

Up in that well-furnished room of the smart hotel we were away from the squalor and noise of the streets, the gray dogs and the baggy-trousered, befezzed Turks, that varied, chattering, cosmopolitan crowd that is perhaps the most interesting in Europe.

I had been in the sultan's capital twice before, and was well known at both the French and British embassies. At the sublime porte I had chatted with the grand vizier and with Tewfik Pasha, who, by the way, was my intimate friend. I had been present at the salamlik, or Friday prayers of his majesty the sultan, and had received hospitality in a number of Turkish houses. Therefore I felt myself quite at home and that unfamiliar, mixed crowd, where the east joins the west.

I repeated my question in a voice, of deep seriousness. "I—I can't tell you, Phil," was his broken response.

"Why?" I cried. But he only shook his head mournfully.

"Surely you—well, you'll still face the music?"

"What's the use?" he queried. "My enemies have succeeded in crushing me. I can't extricate myself. I'm in such a devil of a hole."

"They may have crushed you, my dear old fellow, but they haven't crushed me!" I declared. "Why not explain the whole truth about that affair in Redcliffe Gardens? I've come out here in order to learn it from your own lips. Now, take me into your confidence—do," I urged, lowering my voice.

"I can't," "Why?" "For two reasons. Phil," he answered, unsteadily, looking me in the face. "First, I should lose your friendship forever, old fellow. And you are to-day the only friend I have in the whole world." And there was a catch in his voice. "And, secondly, I should—"

"Should what?" I asked. "Come, out with it. This isn't like you, Granny."

"I'd break faith with a woman." I said nothing. What could I say? No man was ever more loyal to women than Granville Gough. The other sex liked him for his merry, easy-going manner, his perpetual light-heartedness, his brimming good humor and his natural bonhomie. But as in business, so in love, I had never known him to act dishonorably.

"Then you've pledged your word—eh? To whom?" "To somebody you don't know," he replied.

"And that somebody knows the whole truth concerning the affair in Redcliffe Gardens?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Who is she? May I not, at least, know her name?" I asked, my hand again upon his shoulder.

For a moment he did not reply. Then, looking me in the face again, his clean-shaven countenance twitching convulsively, he said—

"Her name is Elfrida Maynard."

I started, staring at him for a moment. Then, without comment upon what he had told me, I said:

"Confide in me, dear old fellow. Why have you fled like this? Surely you are not actually guilty?"

His chin sank again upon his chest, and his eyes were downcast.

"Ask her," he whispered, hoarsely. "Ask her." She knows the awful truth. Ah! he suddenly cried in a wild voice, "why have you come here, Phil? Why have you come here to taunt me? It is awful—horrible! You cannot dream how terrible is my punishment!"

And standing before me he exhibited his trembling palms, and then turned on his heel and paced the room with his hands to his brow in a frenzy of wildest despair.

He was, I saw, haunted by the recollection of that terrible night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

By the Blue Bosphorus.

That evening after a light dinner in the big table d'hôte room of the hotel we strolled in the sundown to the Galata bridge—that tickety wooden structure across which passes in hour-panorama every type of European and of Asiatic, from the frock-coated, top-hatted Parisian to the Arab in his bunnouse, the Syrian in his turban, the waddling veiled woman or the wild, armed Kurd from his far-off native steppe.

We paused for a few moments to watch the phantasmagoria of life around us. From the minarets of St. Sophia and all the smaller mosques came clear distinct voices of the priests calling the faithful to prayer, while on our left stretched the broad, rippling waters of the Bosphorus, golden in the glorious sundown.

We took the steamer from the bridge, across to Scutari, the ancient town on the opposite side of the Bosphorus, in Asia, and so we left the European shore and stood together on deck looking back upon Constantinople standing upon its hill, crowned by its white domes and tall minarets, and presenting a truly fairytale picture in the soft eastern glow.

As the puffing little steamer plowed her way across the calm blue straits that separate two continents we passed many caïques full of Turks taking their airing after the heat and burden of the day; while more than one head launch flying the flag of a foreign embassy passed us on the way up the Bosphorus to Therapia, that town of white palaces at the water's edge, where the representatives of foreign powers have their summer quarters.



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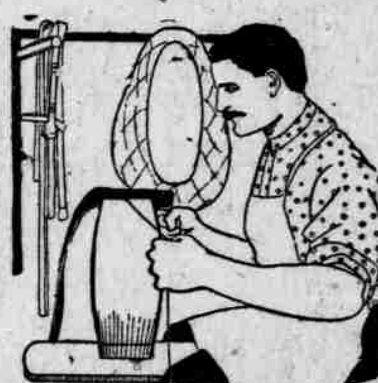
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